

Lafayette Interior Fashions

For more than six decades, the Indiana business has delivered consistent high quality and service to its customers.

In 1950, Lafayette Interior Fashions started as a small venetian-blind company in West Lafayette, Indiana. The store's founder, Joe Morgan Sr., took orders himself and built products in a small, garage-like building before delivering them to his customers.

Although the operation has grown tremendously in the 65 years since, the modern process isn't all that different.





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The Lafayette Interior Fashions family. Back row, from left: Dennis Morgan, Christy Morgan Kerrigan, Joe Nash Morgan III, Joe Morgan II and Toni Morgan King. Front row, from left: Bridgette Morgan and Estella Morgan.

Today, however, it's Joe's children, grandchildren and 500-plus employees who are taking the orders, running the manufacturing facility and delivering the products.

The company experienced most of its growth during the 1980s, expanding to the East Coast, the West Coast and the South. During the busiest times, it operated in six buildings, including three distribution centers.

Today, Lafayette has fewer facilities. It closed two distribution centers in 2014, but maintained its manufacturing facility in West Lafayette and a distribution center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Bridgette Morgan, director of marketing for Lafayette Interior Fashions, said the reductions translate to better service and response time for the company's clients.

In addition to consolidating its facilities, the company introduced six new programs in 2014: Classic Collection

(continued on p. 58)



Lafayette Interior Fashions *(continued from p. 50)*

Aluminum Blinds, Discoveries Custom Vertical Blinds, Heartland Woods Custom Wood Blinds, Parasol Cellular Shades, Tenera Sheer Shadings and the Genesis collection of shades. "We had a lot of history of what we sold, and we were seeking to create complete high-end programs that were exclusive to our dealers," said Morgan.

Although Lafayette Interior Fashions has gone from a couple of products to more extensive offerings, "We still retain the attitude of what we do is what our dealers' business needs are," said Morgan. "It's been such a major change; we're still looking at what Lafayette is today as far as a stand-alone brand." In 2015, the company plans to update and refresh its lines as needed. "At least every 18 to 24 months, we look to see what we might be missing and change to meet trends," she said.

One thing that remains constant is Lafayette's focus on its customer base. "We want to look at what our retailers' needs are," said Morgan, adding that this goes beyond just the products. "We have a partnership program that allows them to work with us on advertising and growth. This isn't just incentives; we're answering questions like 'How should I improve my website?' and 'Where should I advertise?'"

The company keeps more than 30 employees in the sales field who work directly with dealers, especially with regard to training. "With our new programs, we did a complete sales

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guide, wherein we tried to simplify the process,” said Morgan. “We wanted to take away the fear factor and increase sales.” Lafayette retrained its entire sales force on the new products so that they, in turn, could effectively train the dealers. The company also introduced new webinars, training videos and online training packages to help dealers keep their own salespeople trained.

Lafayette Interior Fashions’ deliberate and acute focus on its clients’ needs is the main reason Dawn Winslow Chadwick, owner of Warrenton Decor, in Warrenton, Virginia, near Washington, D.C., decided to work with the company. “It started in 1995, when a very genteel woman came in and asked if I was interested in working with a new vendor,” said Chadwick. “Her demeanor was indicative of all the staff members. The price book was laid out very logically. It was all very low-key, but they were very conscientious in their work.”

Chadwick was especially impressed with Lafayette Interior Fashions’ response to 9/11. She received a “sincere, personal letter” stating that she should let the company know if any of her customers were affected by 9/11 so that Lafayette could work with those people to resolve any financial issues regarding their purchases. “We forged a real partnership at that moment,” said Chadwick.

Those real partnerships with customers are exactly what Lafayette Interior Fashions works toward every day. “We have not changed ownership in 65 years,” said Morgan. “We are still the same core company. We make products in West Lafayette. We’re giving dealers service and quality at every level.” • ~ K. Warren

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